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ABSTRACT

It is possible that conflicts in families with adolescents are linked to the transitions and individual development that occur during adolescence. A study was conducted to describe domains of conflictual issues associated with adolescent grade in school, pubertal status, and gender. The sample was comprised of 78 seventh graders, 115 ninth graders, and 86 eleventh graders. Each subject completed the Issues Checklist and an instrument designed to assess pubertal status. Twenty-six adolescents were assessed as prepubertal, 105 as transpubertal, and 148 as postpubertal. Principal factor analysis with varimax rotation resulted in the retention of four factors accounting for 71.59% of the variance. Stepwise regression analyses were conducted for each factor (using factor scores) with grade in school, pubertal status, and gender as predictors. The results of these analyses indicated that the intensity of School and Household Behavior Issues was greater for seventh and ninth graders than for eleventh graders. Self-Responsibility Issues were related to pubertal status, and were most intense among transpubertal adolescents. Boys reported more intense conflicts over General Issues than did girls. In summary, the affective climate of adolescent relationships with parents can be examined in a variety of different conflictual domains, the intensity of which appears to be related to grade in school, pubertal status, and gender. (Author/NB)

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# Grade, Pubertal Status, and Gender Related Variations in Conflictual Issues Among Adolescents

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Running Head: CONFLICTUAL ISSUES AMONG ADOLESCENTS

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Presented to the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Baltimore, MD, April 1987.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe domains of conflictual issues associated with adolescent grade in school, pubertal status, and gender. The sample was comprised of 78 seventh graders, 115 ninth graders, and 86 eleventh graders. Each subject completed an instrument designed to assess pubertal status and the Issues Checklist (Prinz, Foster, Kent, & O'Leary, 1979). Twenty-six adolescents were assessed as prepubertal, 105 as transpubertal, and 148 as postpubertal. Principal Factor Analysis with Varimax rotation resulted in the retention of four factors accounting for 71.59% of the variance. Stepwise Regression analyses were conducted for each factor (using factor scores) with grade in school, pubertal status, and gender as predictors. The results of these analyses indicate that the intensity of School and Household Behavior Issues is greater for seventh and ninth graders than for eleventh graders. Self-Responsibility Issues was related to pubertal status, and were most intense among transpubertal adolescents. Boys reported more intense conflicts over General Issues than did girls. In summary, the affective climate of adolescent relationships with parents ca: be examined in a variety of different conflictual domains, the intensity of which are related to grade in school, pubertal status, and gender.

## Introduction

Previous research employing adolescent self-reports of conflictual interchanges with parents has provided important descriptive information, for example the tendency for parent-adolescent conflict to focus on relatively mundane issues (Montemayor, 1983; 1986). It is possible that conflictual interchanges in families with adolescents are linked to the many transitions (e.g. school) and individual characteristics (e.g. gender, pubertal status) that occur during adolescence. Research examining the adolescent's adjustment to changes in grade level at school has demonstrated a decline in self-esteem for students entering seventh grade in a new school (Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983). Perturbations in the affective quality of family relations have been associated with adolescent pubertal status (Hill & Holmbeck, 1986; Papini & Sebby, 1987; Steinberg, in press), and may differ by adolescent gender (Montemayor, 1983; Papini, 1987).

However, there have been few attempts to broadly dimensionalize the content of conflictual issues associated with these transitions and individual characteristics. Even fewer attempts have been undertaken to examine potential sources of variation in the onset and intensity of these conflictual domains. The purpose of this study is to describe domains of conflictual issues that adolescents report experiencing, and to examine if the intensity of these

conflictual interchanges is related to the adolescent's grade in school, pubertal status, and gender.

## Method

Subjects. All students enrolled in the seventh, ninth, and eleventh grade levels of a small rural midwestern community participated in this study. There were 279 subjects in all, 78 seventh graders, 115 ninth graders, and 86 eleventh graders. The seventh graders had just initiated the transition into junior high, while the other grades had been in the same school for at least one year. Each subject completed a demographic questionnaire and an instrument designed to assess self-reported pubertal status (Papini & Sebby, 1987). One-hundred and sixty-one of the subjects were male and 118 were female. Responses to the pubertal status instrument indicated that 26 adolescents were prepubertal, 105 were transpubertal, and 148 were postpubertal.

Instrument. Each adolescent also completed the Issues Checklist (Prinz, Foster, Kent, & O'Leary, 1979). The Issues Checklist was selected for several reasons. First, the checklist is comprised of 44 issues that are likely sources of conflict between parents and adolescents. The inclusion of this many issues allows for a greater dimensionalization of conflict than has been attempted in previous studies. Second, the Issues Checklist is a reliable and valid assessment of the prevalence and intensity of parent-

adolescent arguments related to each issue, thereby enhancing dimensionalization and the search for sources of variation in conflictual family relations during adolescence.

## Results

A Principal Factor Analysis was performed using the intensity measure of each adolescent's response to the Issues Checklist. The purpose of this analysis was to identify and describe organized domains of conflictual issues among adolescents. Following Varimax rotation, four factors accounting for 71.59% of the variance were retained using criteria suggested by Dillon and Goldstein (1984). The factor names, factor loadings, and communality estimates are presented in Table 1. Inspection of these factors indicates that adolescent conflict with parents generally involve mundane issues.

Separate Stepwise Regression analyses were conducted for each factor (using factor scores) with grade, pubertal status, and gender as predictors. The results of the regression analyses are presented in Table 2. The interpretation of these findings are facilitated by examining the means and standard deviations of the factor scores presented in Table 3. The major results reveal:

a. Adolescents in seventh and ninth grade reported more intense conflicts with parents over School and Household Behavior Issues than did eleventh graders.

b. Adolescent pubertal status was associated with Self-Responsibility Issues. This finding was reflected by an inverted U-shaped function revealing that the most intense conflicts over this issue was reported by transpubertal adolescents.

c. Adolescent gender was related to the intensity of conflicts with parents over General Issues, with males reporting more intense conflicts than females.

## Conclusion

The results of this study provide support for the notion of affective disturbances in the climate of parent-adolescent relations. The focus of these disturbances have been further dimensionalized through the identification and description of a variety of conflictual domains. The dimensionalization of conflictual issues among adolescents corresponds very closely to dimensions generated in the study of conflict in families with adolescents (Papini, 1987). Among adolescents, the issues associated with conflictual interchanges with parents are likely to focus on school, behavior around the house, accepting responsibility for self, and a variety of general issues. In line with previous research (i.e. Montemayor, 1983), the vast majority of these conflict involve mundane issues. Conflicts over some of the "hot" issues were related to repeated messages from parents to avoid involvement rather than about actual involvement with these issues.

The results of this study also provide support for the notion that disturbances in the affective quality of parent-adolescent relations are related to some adolescent characteristics. Parents appear to expect more responsible behavior from children as they experience pubertal maturation. Similarly, the transition into junior high may generate conflict over school issues and behavior around the house. Perhaps in response to school transitions and pubertal development certain conflictual domains achieve more relevance and become the source for more intense conflicts for parents and adolescents.

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Table 1

Factor Names, Factor Loadings, and Communality Estimates Following Principal Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation.

| Factor Name | Factor Loadings | Communality |
|---|---|---|
| F1: School Issues | | |
| Lying | .62 | .51 |
| Getting in trouble at school | .59 | .53 |
| Bothering parents | .53 | .44 |
| Getting low grades in school | .53 | .54 |
| Getting up in the morning | .44 | .47 |
| F2: Household Behavior Issues | | |
| Putting away clothes | .54 | .43 |
| Fighting with siblings | .52 | .41 |
| Talking back to parents | .51 | .61 |
| Cleaning up bedroom | .50 | .37 |
| Making too much noise at home | .45 | .48 |
| Messing up the house | .44 | .35 |
| Helping out around the house | .43 | .44 |
| F3: Self-Responsibility Issues | | |
| Picking books and movies | .63 | .47 |
| Cleanliness (washing, showering) | .58 | .48 |
| Taking care of things | .47 | .41 |
| Using the television | .44 | .40 |
| Table manners | .40 | .33 |
| F4: General Issues | | |
| Drinking beer or other liquor | .57 | .38 |
| Drugs | .54 | .45 |
| Doing homework | .43 | .42 |
| Playing the radio too loud | .40 | .45 |
| Cursing | .40 | .47 |

Table 2

Beta Values, R-Square, F Statistic, and Associated Probability Values for Adolescent Grade in School, Pubertal Status, and Gender.

| Factor | Beta Value | R-Square | F | Probability ≥ F |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F1: School Issues | | | | |
| Grade | -.26 | .05 | 14.63 | .001 |
| F2: Household Behavior Issues | | | | |
| Grade | -.26 | .06 | 17.10 | .0001 |
| F3: Self-Responsibility Issues | | | | |
| Pubertal Status | -.18 | .02 | 5.13 | .05 |
| F4: General Issues | | | | |
| Gender | .29 | .03 | 8.02 | .01 |

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of the Factor Scores for the Significant Predictor Variables.

| Factor | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| F1: School Issues | | |
| Seventh Graders | .10 | .91 |
| Ninth Graders | .09 | .97 |
| Eleventh Graders | -.21 | .59 |
| F2: Household Behavior Issues | | |
| Seventh Graders | .19 | .92 |
| Ninth Graders | .12 | .86 |
| Eleventh Graders | -.34 | .63 |
| F3: Self-Responsibility Issues | | |
| Prepubertal Adolescents | -.07 | .67 |
| Transpubertal Adolescents | .14 | .97 |
| Postpubertal Adolescents | -.09 | .77 |
| F4: General Issues | | |
| Adolescent Males | .01 | .83 |
| Adolescent Females | -.02 | .78 |

Positive factor scores indicate more intense conflict within a particular domain of conflictual issue than negative factor scores.